

His Reality

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Naruto never had anything he couldn't stand losing. At least that's what he thought, until something went wrong and he lost everything that ever mattered to him. Now, he has to decide whether to come back to his reality, or continue dreaming.

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Disclaimer: I don't own Naruto, not even a single whisker.

Hey guys! So I had this story in my head for while now and decided to write it. And yeah, it's more or less 10,000 words. Long, ne? Yippee! I hope it's worth the read. Cause I really worked hard on it.

Anyways, enjoy! And please review!

His Reality

"It's okay Naruto."

"Don't... cry... please."

That voice. He wanted to listen to that voice, to listen to what it was saying. To convince himself that indeed, it was okay. He owed that much to the owner of that voice. But he couldn't. Not when he is holding her bloody figure in his arms at that moment.

He had never cried so much before. A man should have enough dignity to not cry, especially in front of a lady. But the tears that flowed from his eyes were not his anymore. They did not want to stop. It felt like he had been crying for a long time, helpless to do anything else. Why didn't he feel it? Feel that she was in danger, that she was at the brink of her death. He kept rummaging through his mind, searching for an explanation. Why didn't he fucking feel any warning?

She was slipping away from him. No matter how hard he tried to keep the blood from flowing out of her body, the blood just kept on oozing. She had too many wounds. The metal bars from where she had been strapped in before had pushed holes in her body through and through. It was as if she was intended to slowly suffer to her death, because the pointed bars had intentionally avoided her vital

organs. She was dying because of blood loss from too many stab wounds.

The sight of her made the other people around them to look away. It was too damn brutal. They couldn't even distinguish the color of what she wore because it all looked like red, soaked in blood red stains. But not Naruto, he was holding her like she was his life and trying so hard to keep her breathing. He knew she was hurt, but he didn't want to lose her by giving up. It angered him how the other ninja were not doing anything to save her. Why was he the only one who was trying?

Seconds ticked by like each of them was a lifetime of agony. She was losing her gaze of him. And soon she would succumb to the darkness. Not even Naruto could save her this time. And it was his fault. It was his entire damn fault. And now she was paying for it with her life.

With a final plea, he asked her to stay.

"Don't go, Sakura-chan."

It was already dark when they reached the middle of the forest. So they decided to set up camp and proceed with the mission at dawn.

"Kiba, you and Hinata can set up the tent," the team leader said while combing his blonde hair with his fingers.

"Shino, Sai, survey the perimeter for rogue nin," he added.

"Sakura-chan, you'll help me gather the woods."

"Hai," all of them said.

Their mission was supposed to infiltrate the hideout of a former medic-nin of the Fire Lord and stop his activities. Apparently, he was a genius who wanted to pursue the height of knowledge so badly

that he chose to experiment on live human. Just like Orochimaru. What made him more dangerous was that he was also an excellent genjutsu user, and a strategist. Teams that had been sent by the other hidden ninja villages had failed miserably to take him down and ended up being live experiments. And it was time that Konoha took a shot to stop this madman.

"What a psycho," Kiba had commented during the mission briefing.

"Shut it, Inuzuka," warned the Godaime Hokage.

"I'm warning you, this is a mission of the highest class. Be extremely careful of this man. He is known to be the sadist."

"We understand, Tsunade-baachan. Don't worry, we'll take him down. We all know we don't want another Orochimaru on our hands."

"Naruto! Let shishou finish, will you?" Sakura said as she pulled Naruto's sleeve.

"Gomen ne." He said with a chuckle.

"As I was saying, Naruto, you'll be the leader of this team. Aburame and Hyuuga will be the trackers. Sakura will be your medic. Sai and Inuzuka will be helpful in the recon. I'd send senior nins to be your teammates but Kakashi and Yamato are off to another mission."

"Is there any questions?"

They had already understood.

"Very well, you leave in three hours. Good luck on your mission."

The people started to leave.

"Not you, Naruto. Stay here."

"What is it baa-chan?"

"Naruto, I want you to know that I've recommended you as my successor as the next Hokage."

"What? I... I mean are you serious?"

"Yes... but there are... complications. You see, the council strongly disagrees with my decision. They fear that your special abilities make you unsuitable and too dangerous for the job."

"You mean the Kyuubi?"

"Yes. As you know, getting the Hokage's position is not just about talent and potential, it's also about politics. Without the council's support, you cannot ascend to the title." She said. It was obvious in her eyes how clearly disgusted she was by the council's stubbornness.

"Bastards." This pissed off Naruto. He knew he had been hated since he was born and the Kyuubi had been sealed within him. But hadn't he proved enough, time and again that all he wants is to protect the village? It was his greatest goal to be the Hokage, and now that he was strong enough to be one, the only thing that's standing between him and his dream were old conservative geezers.

"However, there is a... proposal from one of the council's members." Naruto knew that hesitancy was rarely heard in the Hokage's voice, but at that moment it was apparent that she was hesitating.

"What is it?" Naruto inquired.

"You see, the Hyuugas have a pull in the council, and if you manage to win their vote, then no one will stand against it, not even the other council members."

"And?"

This made Naruto frown. Hinata and Neji were his friends, but their clan for him was something that he could not understand. He is

clearly resentful of how the main branch of the clan puts a restraining seal on the others to preserve their secrets. In fact, it was one of his plans to abolish this type of cruelty when he became Hokage.

"Hiashi Hyuuga proposed that a marriage between you and his daughter would guarantee your Hokageship."

"Wait, what? You mean Hinata?"

"Yes, Hinata has had feelings for you for a long time and Hiashi is aware of it. Even if he seems a cold-hearted man, he does care for his daughter. But that's not the major reason for this. Having a son-in-law as the Hokage would ensure the clan's status in the village for the next generation. Apparently, it's a win-win situation." The Hokage said sarcastically.

It was too much to take in at once, so Naruto had to breathe for several moments before he replied to the Hokage.

"Isn't there some other way? Baa-chan, I don't think it's right that I marry someone just so I can be the Hokage."

Tsunade sighed.

"I know, Naruto. And I'm not imposing this on you. Hinata doesn't even know of her father's plans yet. And I'm sure she wouldn't agree to force you into marrying her. It is still your decision. Hiashi just wants you to think about it."

"Okay. Can we talk about this when I get back?"

"Of course. Please be careful on your mission."

As Naruto walked away, he couldn't help but think of the two things that mattered to him the most - being the Hokage and being with Sakura.

Naruto almost tripped from a large root of a tree while walking.

"Whoa! Naruto, can you please be careful?" Sakura said. They were at the middle of gathering fire woods, and the team captain was apparently spacing out.

"Ah, Sakura-chan, sorry, I guess I didn't see that root."

"That would explain it if you were blind, dummy." She said, impatience written all over her face.

He just chuckled.

"Are we going to tell me what's wrong or do I have to beat it out of you?" Sakura always knew if something was wrong with him. They had spent too many years together and now, they could unconsciously sense even the slightest mood change from each other.

"It's... nothing," he answered.

He knew Sakura wasn't buying it. With her hands on her hips, she sighed and then sat down at the large root above the earth where Naruto had previously tripped.

"Is it about the mission? We're gonna be fine, Naruto. We're not genins now, remember?," she said, her voice trying to soothe and reassure him. He appreciated that.

"It's not that," he stepped closer to where she sat, but remained standing.

"Then what is it?"

"Tsunade-baachan has recommended me to be her successor," he said after drawing a deep breath.

He saw the change in her expressions as it turned to glee.

"Naruto, that's wonderful! I knew you'd finally reach your dream, you deserve it," she said while she stood up and hugged him.

It felt wonderful to be in her arms, so he wrapped his arms around her, savoring her scent and soft skin. They were still hugging when he decided to speak.

"Congratulations," he could hear her say as she buried her head in his shoulders.

"I need you to give me a reason, Sakura-chan," he breathed with his quiet voice.

"What?," she backed her head away slightly to look at him, but not completely releasing herself from their embrace. She seemed confused.

"The council does not approve of me. But apparently they will if I marry someone from the Hyuuga clan."

Her eyes widened at what he said. Naruto couldn't point out what emotion was in her eyes at that moment.

"Hinata?," she said as she took a step back from him. Naruto instinctively wanted to be closer but he calmed himself.

"The Hyuuga is the only clan powerful enough to turn the council's vote. If I want to become the Hokage, it was their proposal. Hinata doesn't even know yet. And it's not official. But they want me to think about it. If I want to be the Hokage..."

"It's your dream... ," she interrupted, her eyes softening at him.

"But I need you to give me reason, Sakura. We can't keep going in circles anymore. Give me something. Just say the word and I'm sure I can find another way to - "

He knew that she knew what he was talking about, and he was stunned that she stepped towards him and put a warm hand on his

cheeks. He closed his eyes and for a moment, he thought that she would give him the reason he was asking for.

"You should go after your dream, Naruto," she said. And just like that, she was back picking up the fire woods that she had left on the ground.

"That's it, Sakura-chan?"

She just smiled at him.

"Sai and the others might be looking for us now. We should go."

It hurt him. One word from her and he would've given up his dream of being the Hokage. At one point in his life, he had realized that nothing mattered to him more than being with Sakura, not even being the Hokage. Even through all the uncertainty and pain, she had been the one whom he cherished the most.

But now that she made it clear and he knew that being with her would not be possible, maybe it was time that he held on to the second best thing that could happen. When they came back, he would ask for Hinata's hand in marriage.

Dawn came and they continued with the mission. Sakura had been silent the whole time while Naruto suppressed the urge to hold her and ask her one more time if she was sure about what she said yesterday. But he knew her answer would be the same. So he tried to concentrate on the mission.

It became more dangerous as they pushed forward. When they came close, one kilometer outside the hideout, they found corpses and dying bodies scattered around like slaughtered animals. Two of them were still breathing, so they stopped so Sakura could heal them and so they can find information.

"Don't go further. Your deepest fears will become reality." the bloodied man looked up at Naruto. Something in his eyes was strange as Naruto continued to gaze at it. He couldn't look away from those eyes. For a moment it was hazy. He was about to say something but was interrupted by Sakura's voice.

"Calm down, we're here to help," Sakura said as she fervently tended to the man's wounds. Naruto took a step back from the man as he let Sakura do her job.

Something's wrong, he thought. He had been in too many dangerous missions to know that something was going to happen.

After the the team learned the direction for the entrance and the main cell of the madman from the victims, Naruto called for back-up.

"I've managed to close some wounds. They're going to need surgery, but their lives are safe," Sakura said.

"Very well. I've already called for back-up so Sakura-chan, stay with these men and wait for them to come. We'll go head and take this man down."

"No, I'm going with you. This is a dangerous man, and you need all the help you can get. I think everyone agrees with me on this."

"You are staying. We can handle him. When the back-up comes, you will brief them of what we've learned," he said.

"You are underestimating me, Naruto. Let me come with you."

"Not another word," he warned.

"I can create an earthquake for God's sake!"

"That's enough, Haruno! You will not undermine my authority in this team, nor will you disrespect me by disobeying my order. Stay here and that's an order."

Naruto knew that the way he used his voice was so unlike him. Something caught in his throat as Sakura had backed away from him. Guilt plagued over him as he took in Sakura's hurt expression but he resisted the urge to apologize. He could see that even the other team members were shocked by his display.

"Am I understood?," he finally said towards the pink-haired woman after calming his voice.

"Yes, captain," Sakura said, bowing her head and refusing to look him in the eyes.

Deep inside, he just wanted to protect her. And he knew it. He would have to explain later. But right now, they had a mission to complete.

"Alright. Everyone, let's go!"

"Damn it! Won't can't they just die already?," Naruto heard Kiba yell.

"How do we stop them?," Hinata panted as she dodged a kick from one of the enemies.

As soon as they stepped inside the hideout, hundreds of human-like creatures started to attack. They were like puppets in human bodies. They didn't bleed, scream or cry in pain, they just fought. And everytime Naruto hit them with Rasengan or Sai released his painted monsters on them, they would just stand up after a couple of seconds.

"It seems that they are just draining us of our chakra until we are unable to fight," Shino said. They were being pushed away from the entrance and into the belly of the hideout.

Naruto had large reserves of chakra, but his team mates didn't have that privilege. And after almost an hour of fighting with these undead creatures, their reserves were already low. He had to find a way to escape these enemies or they were finished.

"Damn," he cursed. Even he was getting tired. It was a good thing that he didn't let Sakura come with them.

As the team fought, they heard a crash outside, probably near the entrance. It was the sound of boulders crashing, like an earthquake had just occurred. He wondered who or what had caused it, because all his team mates were inside. But before he could run outside to see what had happened, a large wall had blocked his vision and closed in around him and his team mates. A scream interrupted his thoughts.

"Naruto-kun!"

"Hinata!" The Hyuuga heiress was being held by three creatures, their arms preventing her to move.

"Let go of her!," Kiba yelled.

Rasengan was already swirling in Naruto's hands as the rest of his team mates came at his side, ready to charge and save Hinata. The enemies had stopped their movements as a voice came.

" Nuh-uh-uh boys... You take one step towards the girl and we'll break her bones like sticks ."

"Let her go," Naruto said, anger apparent in his voice.

" But I want to have some fun. "

A blink of an eye was all it took for the Hinata, captured in the enemies' arms to disappear. Sheer anger boiled inside Naruto as he produced a hundred clones with a hundred rasengans and obliterated the remaining creatures around them. It had significantly weakened him but he didn't care. He was the captain and he was supposed to take care of his team, damn it. He would not allow any of his team mates to get hurt if he can help it. He stumbled, only to have Sai and Shino support his side so he wouldn't fall.

" *Oh? What a strong bunch you are!*," the voice sounded amused.

" *Epecially you, kitty-boy.* "

"Shut up, you freak! Where did you take her?," Kiba angrily snarled.

" *If you find me, I'll tell you.* " And then the voice was gone.

"Bastard," Shino muttered.

After a few moments of regaining energy from soldier capsules, it was time to think of a plan.

"What do we do captain?," Sai asked. The entrance was blocked so any chance of escape was impossible at the moment.

"We need to find Hinata first. Our team mate is the first priority." Naruto said.

"The bugs I planted on the five of us are still active, except on Hinata-san's." Shino explained.

"But my bugs can sense the energy in this hideout. I think I can lead us to where the energy is coming from. I'm pretty sure that's where the madman is."

"What if it's a trap?" Kiba said, unconvinced.

"My bugs never lie. And it's our only shot."

"Okay. Let's do it. I don't need to tell you to be careful." Naruto ordered.

As Shino had said, they found where the energy was coming from. The room was empty, except for a marble chair in the middle of it, and a green-eyed man sitting in it with a smile upon his face.

"That's him?" asked Naruto.

"My bugs say so." Shino answered. The man did not look threatening at all, but the aura he gave off was so dark and sinister.

"You found me. Such clever ninjas." The man stood up and walked over to them.

"Don't." Naruto said in his dark voice as a clone was already beside him holding a kunai upon his throat.

"Kitty-boy doesn't want to play," he said as he laughed.

"Where is Hinata?"

"I just want to play."

"Enough!" The clone went and stabbed his leg. Not so much as a groan escaped from the man's lips.

"Oh, that hurt, kitty-boy. Eew, I'm bleeding." The man said in a hurt voice, pouting his lips towards Naruto's clone.

"Tell us where she is or I'll - " Naruto was interested as the man held his arm up.

"Okay, okay, I'll tell you. But you have to choose first, then hurry."

"What?"

"You see this middle room branches out to two rooms on opposite sides. In one of those rooms is your precious Hinata-chan and in the other is... er... uhm... one of my captives. You see the doors on the opposite sides of this room don't you?"

Naruto's team didn't say anything.

"You can only choose one door to open. Cause only one can open at one time." He laughed a sinister high-toned laugh, clutching his stomach as if he had just made the world's funniest joke.

"So the game is, I'll tell you who is in each of the two rooms, and you have two minutes to open a door and run to the person you want to save. Remember, you can only save one... and after the two minutes is up, if you manage to save one person, the other will probably die. But the other door will open, so you can get the dead body. Aren't I generous?" He was laughing again and it made Naruto's skin crawl with disgust.

"Are you ready?" the man asked.

"Wait! Naruto, who do we save?," Kiba said.

"The man's probably just bluffing about his other captive. I've asked the men from before and they said that everyone except them had died. And the way he said that it was his other captive, my bugs say that he's lying." Shino said.

"I agree with Shino. The man's just trying to confuse us. For all we know, he can already be killing Hinata right now, he's just buying some time to get us to slow down." Sai said.

"The trick here is to get to Hinata as fast as we can. We can't risk our team mate's life." Naruto and his team had decided. He just hoped that it wasn't too late.

"Okay." The man jumped happily.

"Let's start! Let's hear the scream of the person from the left room!" The man comically curved his hand over his ear. A scream was heard.

Kiba's head perked up at the sound.

"That's Hinata! I'd recognize her anywhere. She sounds like she's in pain." His voice was drenched with panic.

"Ah! And now, let's hear the scream from the right room!"

But before they could hear anything, Naruto had already spoken.

"Open the door to the left room."

A smile could be seen in the man's face.

"Wha... but I'm not finished yet." He pouted.

"Just open it."

"Oh well." The man acquiesced. As soon as the door opened, Naruto and the rest of the team were out of the room, leaving the man. He immediately hit the clone in the gut, effectively dispelling it. And then with a smile, he curved his hand above his ear once again to the scream of a pink-haired beauty.

" *Naruto...* "

They were right. Hinata was in the room, strapped in a metal cross with holes in it.

They wasted no time in freeing Hinata, and as soon as they got her off the cross, pointed metals protruded swiftly from the holes. Had Hinata been strapped there, she wouldn't have any chance of survival, Naruto thought. Relief took over his body as he sighed. They were running to get back to the middle room. But whatever relief Naruto had vanished as a sobbing Hinata took off the material above her mouth and screamed a name.

"SAKURA-SAN!"

Blood left Naruto's face in seconds as he heard her name.

"What?," Kiba yelled.

"She followed us here."

It couldn't be. He ordered her to stay with the injured men. It was impossible. His expression turned to horror as he remembered the

crash of boulders he heard back then before Hinata's capture. It was so familiar... and it sounded like... like an earthquake.

" I can create an earthquake for God's sake!"

"NO!"

Immediately, Naruto ran like he had never done before, leaving his team mates trailing behind. By the time he had reached the middle room, the madman was gone. But that didn't occupy his mind as he reached the door at the other side.

In the fifty seconds that it took to reach the right room, Naruto prayed so hard that Hinata lied about Sakura being there. He was so scared out of his mind that all he could do was run so fast. And for some reason he could not explain, his eyes were already watering.

"Please don't be there," he pleaded in his mind.

Shattered.

Everything in him was shattered as he took in her form. A body was strapped in a metal cross, the wrists and ankles bound. It just like what Hinata had been before, only this time, the body was speared with pointed metals and soaked in so much blood. The wounds in her chest, stomach and everywhere else were not even visible because of the blood. Even Naruto had never seen so much blood in his life. It was dripping everywhere, from her fingertips to her toes.

He didn't know how he got her out of that cross and he didn't know what he felt as he did, but he got her out of the cross at an amazing speed. It was not until he held her upper body in his lap when he realized that he couldn't move her that all painful emotions crushed his chest.

"S..Sakura-chan?," he asked. He wished with his life for this woman not to be his Sakura-chan, but it went unanswered.

"Naruto," the woman said in a soft voice, her green eyes looking up at him wearily.

It was then that he cried out loud, screaming and trying so hard to breathe. She was bleeding to death. He had heard of it before. It's the type of death one wants to avoid because it was agonizingly slow.

"I told you not to come. I told you.. I ordered you... I ordered you... ," he said in between his sobs while he took off his jacket to cover her form, hoping that it would stop the bleeding.

"I could feel you were in danger." She managed to cock her head to the side.

"I couldn't let you be hurt..."

"Stupid... stupid... I'm sorry."

"For... what? For being a jerk with me... before you left?" she asked while trying to chuckle.

"I should've saved you." Tears were continuously flowing.

"The man... said... that you... were... going to save... just one of us... the one who was... more important..."

His watery eyes widened and looked at her intensely.

"I understand... It's okay," Sakura said.

"No, you're wrong! He didn't say it was you... I... You're the most important.,, You are..." He wanted to explain. Tell her that everything he did was to protect her. That he would give his life in a blink of an eye just to see her live. But there wasn't time to explain. And it seemed like she wasn't listening.

"Naruto. Would you... hold it against me... if I said that... I love you?"

"What?"

She feebly tried to raise her hand. Naruto held it to stop her from moving. It would only agitate the blood flow.

"Let me hold you... please?," she said.

So hesitantly, he brought her hand to his cheek, just like what she had done before. She felt cold to him.

"I didn't..want... to... get in the way... of your dreams... I don't belong to a clan... that can support you... so I."

"Stop," he said, his tears becoming impossibly fast treading across his face.

"I don't want to be the Hokage if I'm not with you Sakura-chan... You're all I want. I need you. I love you so much."

"You're... a generous liar."

She closed her eyes, which alarmed Naruto. But he also saw a small smile creep upon her bloody face.

By the time Naruto felt the others come into the room, he heard Hinata's sobbing gasp and the others' shocked breaths.

"I'll go get help," Sai said as he turned around and tried to wipe something away from his eyes.

Kiba walked behind Hinata to wrap his arms above the woman's eyes, so she would not see Sakura's bloody form. They were both silently weeping at the sight. Shino bowed his head, his hands fisted on his sides.

Naruto paid them no mind. He kept saying Sakura's name over and over again until his voice was hoarse. It seemed like hours when he held her. Her blood had drenched his clothes by then.

"It's okay Naruto."

"Don't... cry... please." He could hear her. But he couldn't stop his tears.

"Don't take her away please." He didn't know to whom he prayed but he prayed hard to make Sakura okay. And then he looked at her.

"Don't go away, Sakura-chan... I love you... I love you" It was like an ineffective mantra.

"Stay with me..." he whispered. He could feel her slipping away. But he didn't want to believe it.

With a final breath, she smiled her sweetest smile at him as she started to speak her last words.

"I'll..stay... with you... forever... if you want..."

He nuzzled her nose with his as he held her closer and felt the coldness envelope her. His eyes closed as he hugged her and he settled his head on her shoulders, the smell of blood around them, but he didn't care anymore. Just like that, she was gone.

He screamed a silent scream that only angels in heaven could hear.

"Naruto, you need to give her to me. You can't carry her all the way home."

"You need to rest."

"At least eat a little."

"I'm sorry."

Words were futile to get Naruto to snap out of his distant gaze as he held a kunoichi's body against his chest. Kakashi-sensei and Yamato-taichou came with the back-up. But everyone knew they

were too late - too late to capture the madman, too late to save Sakura.

Naruto refused to let her go, even as they were travelling back to Konoha. He was already out of energy but he just wouldn't let anyone touch her. So Kakashi-sensei settled with giving him a grey travelling cloak so he could cover the body in his arms.

His pace was slow because of his lack of strength, so they had to stop every once in a while so Naruto could rest.

He sat under a tree and bowed his head. It was inexplicable how he felt. He wanted to claw his hands into his chest and rip his heart out, so he could put it inside Sakura so her heart would beat again. But it was impossible. As they rested, Kakashi-sensei's ninja dogs would gather around him, nuzzling Sakura's feet and then whining sadly. He felt they understood. But no one would understand. He let her die, he let her feel that she was not important to him, he let her think that he did not choose to save her because she was unimportant. He should've been the one who died.

"I've informed Tsunade-sama of... what happened..." Kakashi-sensei said hesitantly to Naruto.

"She's waiting for us. We need to get Sakura home." Naruto flinched as he mentioned the name. But he barely nodded as he stood up again with the body in his arms.

As he walked, he felt Sai's hand on his shoulders, gripping it tightly. His face didn't betray what he was thinking, but what he said next surprised Naruto.

"We loved her too Naruto."

And then he proceeded to walk ahead. His chest became impossibly heavier as he saw the Konoha gates.

He was the last one to cross the gates. Naruto could see the Hokage, along with Shizune and some other jounins that he did not know. He noticed the stretcher held by one of them. He could see Tsunade speaking to Kakashi-sensei and a sobbing Hinata.

Shizune approached him, a sad expression on her face. She stopped after a few steps and held out her two hands, as if gesturing to take Sakura from his arms. His mind froze.

"No."

He took a step back. No one would take her away.

"Naruto..." He heard the pleading tone in Shizune's voice. Tears were forming in her eyes. She took another step towards him.

"I said no!," he yelled. He could see everyone's head turning to him but he didn't care. It was so painful. He was pained inside and out and he felt that the coldness coming from the body that he held was the only thing from Sakura that comforted him. He didn't want to let the cold go. But he was already dizzy.

Nobody dared to come closer to him as he held her, until Tsunade came before him, Yamato-taichou in tow.

The Hokage's voice was soft and sincere.

"Naruto. You need to give her to me." She didn't move, neither did he. She was being patient with him.

After several moments, he managed to look at her. No sound came from her but he could see the tears already streaming from her chin. That's when he broke down too.

"I specifically told her to not come. I didn't know that she even followed us... I - " He spoke as if a dam of sadness had been released.

"It's not your fault."

"Yes, it is! I'm the captain. I should've protected every member of my team. But I didn't. And she... "

"Naruto, stop."

"She's not just a team member. She's Sakura-chan okay? She's Sakura-chan! She's the one thing I promised myself I wouldn't lose. And she told me... she told me she loved me too, but it was too late... I... God damn it!"

He fell to his knees and that's when the tears really started to flow. God knows that nobody had seen him cry like that. Tsunade-baachan kneeled too and put her forehead against Naruto and held both his arms.

"Baa-chan..." He said it like a lost boy who would never find his way home. Tsunade-baachan stayed like that in front of him, with Sakura unmoving and cold between them.

"She's never coming back," he added. The Hokage just nodded, while silently weeping for her little brother and the apprentice she considered her daughter.

"I know."

"You can give her to me, ne?" she said after a while. Naruto, sobbing, looked up at her with sad blue eyes.

"You'll take care of her?," he asked. He needed to make sure that Sakura-chan would be in good hands.

"I promise with all my heart. Hokage's word."

Naruto was still sniffing as he stood up, his tear-stained face seen by the people that had gathered at the gate.

The Hokage then slowly took Sakura's body from Naruto's arms, stopping silently to make sure that Naruto was okay with it. Finally, she was out of his arms. He watched as Tsunade-baachan carefully

held the body and turned around to take her away. That's when he felt darkness enveloping him. He wanted to go after Sakura so he'd know where they would take her, but his knees failed.

"Sakura-chan..." he called, wishing that her voice would answer.

"Naruto!" It sounded like a voice in panic.

He closed his eyes.

It was not the voice he wanted to hear.

It was not her voice.

He could hear a beeping sound somewhere in his right. His head was woozy and limbs felt like they were sagging from weakness. That's when he wondered where he was.

As he opened his eyes he saw a white ceiling. And he felt something attached to his nose. As he felt around his face to take it off, a hand stopped him from removing the device.

"Don't do that, you need to rest."

"Kakashi-sensei, I'm in the hospital?," he inquired.

His teacher just nodded with a somber expression in his visible eye.

"I had a really terrible nightmare. Everything was wrong... it was horrible." His throat started to constrict and his heart beat faster.

"Calm down. Tsunade-sama will come around soon to check up on you."

"What happened?" He closed his eyes trying to concentrate and remember, and then opened them again to see lilies set up at the table beside him. They were beautiful... exactly like...

"Naruto, listen to me..."

"Where's Sakura-chan?" he snapped his head as far as he could and tried to sit upright.

Kakashi immediately went beside him and tried to stop him from moving.

"Tell me! Where is she?" He stared at his teacher with all the sense of authority and frustration he could muster. He needed to know.

"Sakura... is at her parent's house." He visibly calmed.

"At the wake," *At her wake*. Kakashi added. The memories came flooding to him - her bloodied form, their final conversation, the way he carried her home, the way she would never wake up. He refused to believe it. It couldn't be true. It's not true.

"No. Let me go!" he bellowed. He needed to get out so he could see her. She must have ended with her shift at the hospital right?

"Sensei let me go!" But the man was holding him with a snake grip.

"Get your fucking hands off me! Sakura-chan! Sakura-chan!" He called her so loud so she can hear him. Where was she? She can't possibly be dead.

"She's gone Naruto!" His sensei said this while gritting his teeth. It was obvious that he was in pain too. Naruto's heart beat was faster now. He was hyperventilating.

"No! She's not... How can she be dead? Sakura-chan! Sakura-chan!..." He yelled her name over and over again. He thrashed around while Kakashi held him down. Something wet hit his face, and he realized that like him, Kakashi was crying too.

"What's happening here?" He heard Tsunade-baachan's voice.

"Please sedate him," he heard Kakashi say as he tried to restrain Naruto.

"No! No! Let me go, for fuck's sake! I need to see her... please... please... I'm begging you." His voice started out loud, but it soon turned to a pleading volume. He knew he sounded desperate and miserable. He watched the Hokage as she was handed a syringe and she tried not to look at his eyes when she injected him.

Several moments just passed and immediately darkness was looming over him. But the pain he felt in his chest did not seem to weaken. It was just as painful. And it was only his body that was succumbing to sleep.

"She's... not... dead." He said with all the strength he could muster before the drug injected to him took effect.

It was a different kind of sleep, because his mind refused to sleep. Only his body was held down and restricted by whatever they injected him with. Though his eyes were closed, he could feel every movement that happened in the hospital room and he could hear what they said.

"Poor boy. He couldn't accept what happened," someone had said, possibly a nurse.

There were three steps to his right and the sound of something tapping could be heard. She was writing on his medical file.

Another feminine voice came.

"I know. They had to sedate him like this so he wouldn't hurt himself."

"He must have loved her."

"Yes, Sakura-san was a kind person. I really thought that the two of them could be happy."

These types of talk would go on and on that it almost hurt his ear to hear those voices. It angered him to no end how the pity in their voices was apparent. He didn't deserve pity. And nobody had the right to talk about Sakura. They were lucky enough that he couldn't move.

His fellow ninja visited him, as he could recognize their voices. He wanted to find some relief in that fact, but it never came. Neji visited with Kiba and Hinata, and he still couldn't move.

He felt something touch his shoulder, probably Kiba.

"I'm so sorry, man."

Then sobs came as cold fingers held his hand. Hinata again.

"I feel like it's my fault Naruto-kun. I'm actually glad that you're asleep right now, because I do not know how to face after what happened." He was thankful too, that he could not reply. Because he didn't know what he'd do. He wanted to blame someone, something for Sakura's death, but try as he might, the blame would always come back to him. It wasn't Hinata's fault. It was his.

"Can't they just let him go see her? I mean one last time. At the funeral, at least," he heard Kiba say. Neji was the one who answered.

"I heard that the Hokage was debating whether or not to let him. She is afraid that he would not be able to handle it. But it is in my opinion that they should let him, it would give him some peace of mind." No, it wouldn't, Naruto thought. Nothing would give him any form of peace now. He didn't even know if he wanted to see her now at that state - stone-cold and dead. What he wanted was her warm touch and sweet smile, her painful punch even, not the shell that was her body.

More people came. Ino came with flowers, smelling of both sweet fragrance and tears. Shikamaru was with her. He didn't say anything,

just jabbed Naruto in the stomach. Chouji left potato chips at his table, whispering to him that he could have all the chips that he wanted until it made him feel okay. Chouji was sweet like that, but it would take more than potato chips to make him okay. Tenten sobbed along with an inconsolable Lee, and Naruto could feel Lee's tears fall to his arms. It was Lee that loved Sakura the most, of course, not as much as Naruto did, but Sakura was something precious to both of them. And through his tears, Naruto felt that Lee was immensely hurt by what happened. He wanted to apologize, but couldn't. He too wanted to cry in his state when Lee spoke.

"Naruto-kun, she had to make a choice, even if it meant her death. And that choice was you. It was always you."

After that, Shino paid him a visit. Naruto could tell by the sound of his footsteps. Shino's were the quietest footsteps he had ever heard. If it weren't for the silent buzzing around him, most people wouldn't even hear his presence. Like Shikamaru, he didn't say anything, he just stayed by his side for an hour or so. When it was time to go, he just tapped Naruto's feet twice and walked away.

Sai visited him last, along with Yamato-taichou. As for Kakashi-sensei, he never really left the room. And he never said anything. Naruto just heard brush strokes the whole time Sai was there. It was only once that Sai decided to speak.

"I read in a book that losing someone to death was really painful and difficult. I never wanted to believe it because everyone dies really. No one can escape it. It's natural. Naruto-kun, I didn't believe it, until now, because I feel it too. And I know that I cannot learn in a book the ways the ways in which you can heal. I am deeply sorry for that."

Sai was starting to feel. It was too bad that it took Sakura's death to make it happen.

No amount of consoling could make Naruto feel better. In the silence of his room, he was forced to think. And he didn't like it one bit, because it forced him to think of Sakura. In his mind, she was alive

and well, and punching his lights out. But he knew that the moment he opens his eyes, she would be dead and gone. He wanted to sleep, to really sleep. But his mind was too pained and messed up to give him that kind of privilege. God, he never knew that he can feel such agony. Since childhood, it never occurred to him that something worse than having a monster inside him could ever happen to him. But now that he had lost Sakura, he realized he was wrong.

After some hours, Tsunade came to the room and spoke to Kakashi.

"Will you wake him up?," he heard him ask.

"Yes. We owe it to him."

No! He screamed in his mind. Don't let me move! Don't let me see! Let me stay this way.

But in a few minutes, he could already move his muscles and open his eyes. As his gaze settled to Kakashi-sensei's face, he pushed a black material to Naruto's hands.

"Naruto, you feel okay?," Tsunade asked while checking his vitals.

"Do I look okay?" Usually he'd get a beating for these kinds of retorts but this time Tsunade-baachan just looked at him with sad eyes.

"It's the funeral today. And there's a memorial too. Change into those clothes. Kakashi will accompany you there."

Naruto tensed and closed his eyes. He didn't want to go through with it. If he went there, then he would acknowledge that she really was gone. He didn't want that.

"Naruto, do this for her. She would want you there," he heard Kakashi-sensei say, his eyes settling outside the window.

He had no choice. No choice but to face it.

There were a lot of people that he recognized but didn't bother to greet. His muscles were stiff and it took him great force to move from where he stood. It made him uncomfortable to wear the black long sleeved shirt and pants that Kakashi-sensei provided him.

"One foot in front of the other, Naruto," Kakashi-sensei urged.

He wanted to move. But he could already see the coffin at the end of the lane, a picture on top of it. He bet it was her favorite picture of herself, the one he took a few months ago. It made it much harder.

It felt like an eternity before he reached the white coffin. He didn't realize that he was holding his breath the whole time and his lungs burned when he released a breath. He could see her face, but it wasn't really her face. So he closed his eyes and tried to imagine her smile, his favorite smile. But he was mortified when the image that came to him was her bloody face. He stepped away from the coffin. He couldn't do it, he couldn't say goodbye.

A slight movement brought his attention to a woman with pink-hair. Sakura was just like her, but not quite. An aged man was beside her, he also had Sakura's beautiful emerald eyes.

"Naruto-kun?," the woman inquired.

"Kyoko-san, Hyaku-san... ," he acknowledged. He couldn't bring himself to meet their eyes. He felt he didn't deserve it.

"We're so glad you could come. Our baby-girl would be so happy." The man tried to shake his hand but Naruto failed to return the gesture.

The teary-eyed woman held something in her arms.

"We were waiting for you, because we wanted you to have these."

It was her forehead protector, and a framed picture of Sakura and Naruto. In it, he was kept in a headlock by a smiling Sakura. Of

course, he too, had a contented smile. He had a copy in his room, just like it. He wanted so badly to go back to that time and stop the clock so he wouldn't have to deal with this reality.

"I... I can't accept this. I'm sorry."

"No, you must have it," the woman said as she cried, grief seen in her features.

"S..Sakura loved you. We could always tell by how she talked about you, how she treated you. You are precious to her. It's only right that you have it. Please." He felt her hands on top of his. The man looked at him with pleading eyes too. He held it until he could not anymore. Naruto started to cry.

"I don't deserve it. I'm sorry! You shouldn't even forgive me, because she's dead because of me. If I could, I'd trade places with her right now. I'm sorry."

"Naruto, please it's not your fault." A pair of arms surrounded him. He wanted it to remind him of Sakura's embrace, but it didn't.

"People keep saying that but that doesn't make it true. You'll never see her because of me. And it's so painful... I want to die right now so I could see her again." He pressed his eyes tightly so tears would no longer fall. It was so shameful to break down in front of Sakura's parents and in front of Sakura, but he couldn't stop. He wished for death, for a thousand kunais to hit him at that moment so he would feel how Sakura felt when she died.

" *Naruto, I'm here.* "

"What?," he asked breaking from the woman's embrace, his eyes confused. He looked at Kyoko-san, but it wasn't her voice. He looked around for the owner of the voice, but failed to find it.

"Naruto-kun, something wrong?"

" *Right here.* " He felt warmth touch his hand, and then his cheek. But he could see nothing of its source.

" *Please.* "

Finally, his eyes settled on the figure beside the coffin. It was a woman with emerald eyes, and pink hair. She was as beautiful as he remembered her. And more importantly, she was breathing, alive.

He walked over to where she was, unsure if she was real. He held out his hand to touch her face. To his surprise, she was warm. And that sort of touch was something that he could only attach to Sakura.

"Sakura-chan?"

" *Naruto.* "

"Is it really you?"

" *I'm here.* "

"Am I crazy?"

" *Please wake up.* "

She felt so real, so he decided to turn to crowd and tell them that she wasn't dead.

"Kyoko-san, Sakura-chan's not dead!"

"What are you saying?" The woman seemed appalled as she cried more miserably.

"She's here. Beside me. Can't you see her?"

"Naruto, stop this. Our daughter is in that coffin. She's dead." The man said, anger apparent in his face.

"No, she's here. I'm holding her hand right now! Sakura-chan, why can't they see you?," he asked the woman beside him. She was indeed his Sakura-chan. But why couldn't they see her?

"Naruto, I think we better leave. The sedatives might be having some side effects." He saw Kakashi approach him, as if ready to drag him out of the place.

"No, Sensei. She's here. And she's alive. Don't you see her?" He looked at the coffin. Maybe that was why he didn't recognize the dead body's face. Because it wasn't Sakura.

"That's not Sakura in the coffin! Just look!" He proceeded to open the coffin.

He could hear screams and cries of women as he opened it.

"Dear Lord! My daughter!" Kiyoko screamed, sobbing uncontrollably.

"Get away from her Naruto!" Hyaku warned as he punched Naruto's face.

"Why can't you see? It's not her! She's with me right now." He said that as he stood up. Living Sakura was right beside him. He felt two pairs of strong arms restrain him. They were Neji and Shikamaru's.

"Enough Naruto, this is crazy! Do not ruin this for Sakura." Shikamaru said.

"But Sakura-chan's alive. She's right here. I'm not crazy! I can feel her. Sakura-chan! Tell them, please." He pleaded for the woman to speak.

" *Naruto, wake up.* " The woman smiled somberly.

"Did you hear that? She's here!" But the people looked at him with pity and anger.

"I feared this would happen," he finally heard from the Hokage. She approached him with a syringe of colorless liquid. Knowing what she was intending to do, Naruto struggled out of the two nin's grasp, but was unsuccessful.

"I'm sorry Naruto."

"No, baa-chan! She's really here! No, don't!" He felt the pressure in his arm and his legs felt like jelly.

"She's... alive... Sakura-chan..." He called, and refused to close his eyes. But the drugs were taking effect at an incredible speed. He focused his gaze on the woman he loved, alive and breathing. She spoke to him.

"Naruto, stay with me."

"Sakura..."

"You need to wake up now."

He was suddenly feeling numb. But he forced his mind to concentrate on that voice.

"Wake up. I'm here. Stay with me."

"Please stay with me."

A voice.

It kept calling him. So familiar. So warm. So comfortable.

But he couldn't feel anything.

It was only that voice that he heard.

"Wake up." What a beautiful voice,

"Wake up." He wanted to hold on to that.

" *Open your eyes.* " He wanted to see the face where it belonged to.

" *I'm with you.* "

...

...

"Sakura-chan?" It was then that he felt a sharp pain all over his body.

" *Wake up.* "

The voice became stronger, clearer. And he could also feel his body. It was once floating. But now it felt like it was being dragged down. Where was he heading? Was he dead?

" *Wake up.* "

It got louder. God, he wanted to open his eyes.

" *Wake up.* "

It was a heavy feeling. Where was Sakura-chan?

" *Wake up.* "

"Wake up, man!" The masculine voice was so loud that he shot up from where he was, his eyes wide in confusion.

Naruto could see that the man in front of him had a joyful expression on his face.

"Kiba? Where am I?" His own voice sounded more confused than ever.

"You're in the hospital, dude. Man, you were out cold for three weeks. We weren't sure if you were ever waking up! Good to have you back!"

"What? Three weeks? How?"

A voice answered his question.

"You were captured by the strong genjutsu of that madman. Thank God you're finally awake."

"Baa-chan? What do you mean genjutsu? Didn't you just sedate me from before? We were at the funeral... and..." He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"What did you dream about?," she asked.

"Dream? It wasn't a dream. It was days of nightmare. Sakura-chan died and I was going crazy and..." He was interrupted as Kiba sighed.

"Man, no wonder about that. While you were out cold here, you kept crying Sakura's name. We don't know how you did that, but you did. She was worried sick about you. She wouldn't even leave your side."

"I don't understand. Can someone just explain here!"

"Naruto, when you were on your last mission, before you got to that madman's base, you encountered injured men, right?"

"Yes, I remember that."

"One of them was the madman himself. Once he looked into your eyes, you were captured, and there wasn't anything your team mates could do."

"Don't go further. Your deepest fears will become reality."

With a sigh, the Hokage continued.

"The genjutsu was so strong that the only one who could break it was the one who cast it on you. It's worse than the Mangekyou Sharingan because it doesn't affect the user and the genjutsu can

stay with you for as long as the user wants it. Your team had to fall back and wait for back-up. By the time Kakashi and the others attacked the hideout, the madman had already committed suicide. They took you home, but you wouldn't wake up. You just kept screaming Sakura's name."

"But... it felt so real, baa-chan. I felt like I was dying. Sakura bled so much and I let her die. Just so real." He felt it even now, the agony of her death. His chest constricted painfully.

"Just like I said, it's one of the strongest genjutsus. It can create any reality out of your greatest fears and make you believe it."

"Then how did I get out of it?"

"I think your mind fought off the genjutsu. Plus, Sakura kept pushing mental energy into you. It's a fairly new counter-technique for genjutsus but she was willing to try. She never left your side and talked to you like a crazy person." She finished with a chuckle.

He breathed shakily as he tried to mouth the question he had been meaning to ask at the start of the conversation.

"Where is Sakura-chan right now? She okay?"

The Hokage smiled.

"She is fine, Naruto. A little sleep-deprived because of you. But you know, she's used to it because I've always overworked her."

It made Naruto frown how Tsunade-baachan would joke around when he was being so serious. Kiba decided to interject.

"She just stepped out to check out some genjutsu scrolls at the library. She'll come around soon." Kiba smiled a genuine smile.

"Now, I'll be off to spread the good news to everyone. I'll be back tomorrow. Seriously, you had us worried for a while there, Naruto.

Don't ever do that again, especially to Sakura." He said as he started to walk to the door of the hospital room.

Naruto nodded and managed to grin at him.

"He's right you know." His thoughts came back to the woman sitting in the chair beside his bed.

"What?"

"Don't do that again to Sakura. I have never seen her so worried and upset before. Poor girl wouldn't even eat. And I swear her face lost more blood every time you worriedly screamed out her name. She cried, you know, because she didn't know what kind of horror film you were in."

Naruto was speechless. He didn't know how his, er, condition had affected her so much. It made his heart swell though, that she actually cared for him as much as he cared for her.

"Uh... ," he managed to croak out with a slight blush on his face.

"So I guess it's a no right?"

"Eh?"

"The answer to Hyuuga's proposal."

He smiled.

"Yeah, tell them I said hell no. I'll ask Sakura to marry me. And if she says no, I'll ask her over and over again until her ears fall off and she agrees."

"I doubt that she'll say no, Naruto. But that's a good way to get her to agree."

Voices in the hall caught Naruto and Tsunade's attention.

"Sakura-san, might I have a word with you?," a nurse said.

"Uhm,yeah, sure."

Naruto's eyes widened and his heart skipped beats as he heard her voice. His eyes watered at the sound and he wanted to see her then and there. The woman he loved was alive, and he was alive too. He wouldn't waste any chance now. So he started pulling out the needles and other offending device from his body.

"Hey, what are you - " Before Tsunade-baachan could even protest, he was already out of the bed and hurrying over to where Sakura was. The honey-eyed woman just had to smile.

The tiled floor was very cold in his feet. But it was a type of coldness that he would welcome any day. His heart was warm though, and it was palpitating with anxiety. As he walked out the door he finally saw her, the way she should be - alive. She was talking to a nurse, and her back was turned to him. But he could see her bubblegum locks that he would recognize anywhere. She was definitely Sakura. He noticed that the nurse she was talking to stopped midsentence as the nurse saw him with surprise in her eyes. Sakura, probably bewildered, turned around, and saw him.

At first, she looked like she had seen a ghost. And then he could see her expression turn to relief. As for himself, Naruto didn't know what to feel, and he couldn't think straight. It felt like it had been an eternity since he last saw her, the real her.

She took a step towards him. It seemed like both of them didn't know what to do. Someone should say something first. And Sakura beat him to it.

"Naruto, you're awake."

He chuckled, running a hand through his messy hair.

"Yeah, it was pretty annoying how you told me to wake up." He grinned and then leaned to Sakura's touch as she caressed his cheek with her hand.

Tears flowed from her eyes, and he knew that they were both relieved. And then she yelled.

"You idiot! Why are you out of bed! You should be... mmp... "

He crushed her to him and buried his head in her hair. He was intoxicated with her. He held her so tight that she probably would lose air but she didn't seem to mind. Instead, she wrapped her arms around him, inhaling his scent.

"You came back to me," she breathed.

"Because of you. You're my reality Sakura-chan. I'll always hold on to you." He embraced her impossibly tighter but she just welcomed it.

"I love you. More than anything. More than being the Hokage. I won't lose you again."

Sakura nodded and that's when he crashed his lips upon hers, savoring her mouth, her breath, her everything.

After a while, they separated with satisfied smiles on their faces.

"First kiss," Sakura said against his lips.

He hoped for a million more moments like this, for a million more moments of reality. He loved how he held his reality in his arms. And he was never intending on letting it go.

The End

Is it any good? Please tell me.

I'm sorry if it's really long. But I really intended the story to be a one-shot. I think it was best that way.

Anyway, please do review. Thanks! :)